

Prompt action is needed to protect Jenkins House

The Huntington District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the state Division of Culture and History will conduct a public meeting at 7 p.m. Thursday at Huntington High School.

The topic is the preservation and restoration of the historic Gen. Albert Gallatin Jenkins House and its site.

It's my hope the public will support the following:

- That the pool of water located directly in front of the Jenkins House be moved and mitigated elsewhere because it is damaging the house and killing the trees on the front lawn.

- That the Corps' restoration of this historic site be quality work.

- That a Visitor Center with a Slavery/Underground Railroad Museum be constructed to mitigate the loss of historic African-American sites. In addition, the Visitor Center and Museum would allow handicapped access that cannot be provided at the Jenkins House, as well as provide a facility to house Native American artifacts taken from the Greenbottom property.

I would also like to clear up some confusion about what I am supporting. I am not supporting a request to move additional wetlands or eliminate hunting at the Greenbottom Wildlife Management Area. I am only requesting that the historic area be expanded to less than 20 acres of the more than 900 acres the Corps purchased.

My only concern about the wetlands is the few acres of wetlands directly in front of the house that are damaging it.

The original wetlands plan did not include this pool of water in front of the house. This area was flooded after the public meetings, and the flooding of this area was immediately and continues to be protested by the historic preservation community. The wetlands I want moved are not even open to hunting because they are within 500 feet of the Jenkins House. So, moving them will not deprive hunters.

All that I am trying to get accomplished is what was promised by the various government agencies involved in 1989. The wetlands were not close to the historic house and the site was to be restored into a museum.

In addition, I am not supporting

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construction of a Visitor Center/Museum on an inappropriate site.

If this center is constructed on the river side of West Virginia 2, it should be constructed inside a barn that once stood on the property, like the centers at other historic sites, and the floors raised above the flood plain.

If the center is constructed on the south side of the highway, where extensive excavation to widen the road destroyed any significant archaeology sites, it can be constructed to look like a historic barn on the exterior in order for it to blend in with the historic sites, but will not negatively impact any archaeological sites.

Please attend this public meeting and let the Corps of Engineers know you are in support of developing a historic plantation site that will allow the Division of Culture and History to interpret the lives of all the people who resided on the plantation as well as bring significant development through tourism.

The site should be a true cooperative effort between nature lovers and history lovers.

If you are unable to attend the meeting, written comments may be sent to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Huntington District, ATTN: Public Affairs, 502 8th St., Huntington WV 25701-2070.

Karen N. Nance of Barboursville is a historic preservation activist.